

DIVERSE GROUPS BREWING SHAKE-UP OF NATION'S CODES

Approved For Release 2002/02/19 : CIA-RDP86-00244R000200510024-3

Multipronged drives to achieve some uniformity of building codes will accelerate this year. The four model code-writing organizations, in an unprecedented move, will jointly publish two specialized model national codes, one for one and two-family housing and another for rehabilitation of old buildings.

But even as the four groups, which independently sponsor the Uniform, Basic, Southern Standard and National building codes, put the finishing touches on the specialized codes, federal and state governments will continue their push for some form of standardization of codes. These include the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) production of what could be the framework for a national model housing code (ENR 11/26/70 p. 10).

In addition, three of the four model code groups, essentially regional in nature, are studying a proposal to form a Model Codes Research Institute. It would put existing certification programs under one roof, a first step toward providing what could be a national seal of approval for building components and systems. Sponsors of the Uniform, Basic and Southern codes

will decide early this year whether to form the research institute to provide such joint certification.

Meanwhile, 11 states have adopted statewide mandatory provisions for factory-built housing. Some of the laws, many yet to be implemented by administrative rules, cover all industrialized construction. In nearly all of the other states, legislative committees are studying the problems of code updating.

HUD the catalyst. In pressing for uniformity, HUD notes the existence of 5,000 building codes across the country. "Starting out as guidelines to safe and sanitary housing, they have grown into a crazy quilt of archaic, costly and often conflicting regulations," HUD says.

With HUD as the catalyst, the four code groups are producing:

- The final draft of a one and two-family dwelling code, begun in 1967, set for publication this year.

- A rehabilitation code, under a HUD contract, for buildings more than 20 years old.

- Uniform definitions covering construction and components terms, types of buildings, and classes of occupancy under the stepped-up activities of the Model Codes Standardization Council formed by the four in 1967.

The four groups will sponsor a national conference to discuss the rehabilitation code draft on Feb. 9 and 10 in Chicago. The code was prepared by the four under a \$48,606 HUD contract held by the Basic Code sponsors, Building Officials and Code Administrators International, Chicago.

Independent but cooperating. Completion of the specialized codes will formally mark the end of the go-it-alone approach by the four code groups. Officials of the organizations say, however, independent publication of four separate major codes will continue. They say that four codes are best, because there are substantive differences and each code serves localities familiar with it.

The officials also say that if one code group rejects a new idea, another might approve it, thus giving a new technique the chance to prove itself.

While the code groups mull further joint ventures, the move toward a combined research institute by three of the four will get prime attention. None of the organizations alone can match the machinery, money and manpower available to the Building Research Division of the National Bureau of Standards (NBS) at Gaithersburg, Md. Together, they could offer a broad-based and comprehensive program.

Under Operation Breakthrough, the program to develop and market new technology for housing production, HUD and NBS issued 2,400 pages of performance standards, seen by some as the precursor of a national model.

HUD plans first to certify Breakthrough housing under the standards, hoping that housing systems so certified eventually could be erected anywhere, regardless of local codes.

One stands out. Reaction to the Breakthrough standards ranges from opposition, in one case, to warm enthusiasm among top local code officials in eight cities where Breakthrough prototypes will rise on nine sites.

Among the eight, the sole opponent is Lester J. Gillis, former president of the Uniform Code group and building superintendent of Seattle. Gillis says the standards may be arbitrary on issues including fire ratings for exterior cladding that would make it difficult for wood products to compete.

Other officials' reactions ranged from strong support to dispassionate acceptance of the HUD standards.

These groups produce the major model codes

Four organizations exist to produce and promulgate building codes. The models they produce become law only when adopted, with or without amendments, by states or localities.

The codes and organizations are:

- The National Building Code, compiled since 1905 by the American Insurance Association, formerly the National Board of Fire Underwriters, New York City, and adopted in various localities across the country.

- The Uniform Building Code, compiled since 1927 by the International Conference of Building Officials, Pasadena, Calif., widely used in the West.

- The Basic Building Code, compiled since 1950 by the Building Officials and Code Administrators International, formerly the Building Officials Conference of America, Chicago, used in the eastern and north central states.

- The Southern Standard Building Code, compiled since 1945 by the Southern Building Code Congress, Birmingham, Ala., used in the South and Southeast.

The American Insurance Association membership is drawn strictly from private enterprise, the insurance industry. Its code, the National Building Code, is not directly influenced by any public official. The other three organizations have as members municipal building officials.

Each code is widely used in the region from which its membership is drawn.

In recent editions, each of the codes is performance-based. Typically, performance tests published by national test organizations are cited. Large parts of each code, however, are specification type, spelling out the materials that must be used, how they will be used and under what circumstances.

Each code is revised at regular intervals.

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